

Message Text

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ACTION PM-04

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FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA BAHRAIN

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SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

CHUSMTM SAUDI ARABIA

COMIDEASTFOR

S E C R E T MANAMA 0244 SECTION 1 OF 2

E.O. 11652 : GDS

TAGS : MASS, BA

SUBJECT : BAHRAINI INFORMAL REQUEST FOR HELICOPTER

FORCE SURVEY

SUMMARY: BAHRAIN'S CROWN PRINCE/DEFENSE MINISTER HAS ASKED THAT USG FOLLOW FRENCH AND BRITISH BY SENDING SURVEY TEAM TO BAHRAIN TO RECOMMEND AN INTEGRATED EQUIPMENT/TRAINING/MAINTENANCE PACKAGE FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF HELICOPTER WING IN BDF. EMBASSY RECOMMENDS STRONGLY THAT USG BE PREPARED TO RESPOND FAVORABLY TO THIS REQUEST SHOULD IT BE FORMALIZED BY GOB. CROWN PRINCE WOULD HOPE FOR ARRIVAL OF SUCH A SURVEY TEAM NOT LATER THAN APRIL AND HAS SUGGESTED THAT THREE OFFICERS (ARMY, NAVY, AIR FORCE) FROM U.S. MILITARY GROUPS IN SAUDI ARABIA OR KUWAIT SPENDING SEVERAL DAYS IN BAHRAIN WOULD BE ADEQUATE FOR BDF PURPOSES. END SUMMARY

1. MARCH 6 I MADE OFTEN POSTPONED CALL ON BAHRAIN'S MUCH TRAVELED CROWN PRINCE/DEFENSE MINISTER AND DEFENSE FORCE COMMANDER, SHAIKH HAMAD BIN ISA. AS DEPARTMENT AWARE, WHILE EMBASSY RELATIONS WITH SHAIKH HAMAD AND THE BDF ARE CORDIAL, THEY ARE DELICATE SINCE HE PERCEIVES EMBASSY AND USG SHARE THE AMIR'S AND GOVERNMENT'S LACK OF ENTHUSIASM FOR AN OPEN-SECRET

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ENDED BUILDUP OF BDF. OVER LAST TWO YEARS WE HAVE HAD TO

TRY INFORMALLY TO DIVERT THE INTEREST OF THE CROWN PRINCE AND HIS SOLDIERING YOUNG AL KHALIFA COUSINS FROM SUCH ITEMS AS HAWK, TOW AND REDEYE.

2. FOCAL POINT MARCH 6 DISCUSSION WAS SHAIKH HAMAD'S REQUEST FOR USG ASSISTANCE IN DEVELOPMENT OF BDF "AIR WING" WHICH HE VISUALIZES AS SOME FIFTEEN HELICOPTERS EVENTUALLY SUPPORTED BY SEVERAL LIGHT FIXED-WING RECONNAISSANCE AIRCRAFT. ACCORDING TO SHAIKH HAMAD, MISSION OF "AIR WING" WOULD INCLUDE RECONNAISSANCE AND SEARCH AND RESCUE, TRANSPORT OF "SPECIAL FORCES" AND CAPABILITY FOR COMBAT GROUND SUPPORT. CROWN PRINCE PICTURES SUCH A FORCE AS HAVING SUFFICIENT ARMAMENT TO ENGAGE INVADING SMALL CRAFT AT SEA AND INVADING TANKS ASHORE.

3. SHAIKH HAMAD TOLD ME BOTH THE FRENCH AND BRITISH WILL BE SENDING MILITARY/INDUSTRY SURVEY TEAMS TO BAHRAIN THIS MONTH AND HAVE PROMISED TO COME FORWARD WITH AN INTEGRATED PACKAGE OF PROPOSED EQUIPMENT, TRAINING AND MAINTENANCE. HE WOULD NOT LIKE USG, "BAHRAIN'S BEST AND STRONGEST FRIEND", TO FEEL LEFT OUT AND HENCE IS INVITING US TO PARTICIPATE ALSO. (COMMENT: AS DEPARTMENT AND DOD AWARE, WE HAVE ALREADY MADE COMMITMENT IN PRINCIPLE TO PROVIDE CONUS TRAINING FOR BDF HELICOPTER PILOTS WHO WOULD MAN THIS "AIR WING". END COMMENT) AFTER A GOOD BIT OF GRUMBLING ABOUT THE INDIFFERENT ATTITUDE OF USG TO ARMING BDF, AS OPPOSED TO U.S. "RESPONSIVENESS" TO SAUDI, KUWAITI AND UAE MILITARY MODERNIZATION PLAN, SHAIKH HAMAD EXPRESSED STRONG PREFERENCE FOR U.S. PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT OF "AIR WING". HE ALSO SOUGHT TO ASSURE ME THAT IF USG COULD NOT RESPOND TO THIS REQUEST, BDF WOULD TURN ONLY TO OUR "ALLIES", THE FRENCH AND BRITISH. I ASSURED CROWN PRINCE THAT A FRENCH OR BRITISH ROLE IN DEVELOPMENT OF "AIR WING" WOULD CAUSE US NO ANXIETY FROM POLITICAL STANDPOINT, ALTHOUGH WE APPRECIATED THE OPPORTUNITY TO COMPETE COMMERCIALY FOR THE SALE OF SUCH HELICOPTER EQUIPMENT, TRAINING AND MAINTENANCE AS MIGHT BE CONSISTENT WITH OVERALL U.S. POLICY IN THE AREA.

4. AS SHAIKH HAMAD ELABORATED ON BDF'S PLANS, IT APPEARED HE IS SEEKING ARRANGEMENT IN WHICH U.S. WOULD ENTER FMS SALES
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CASE WITH GOB FOR A TOTALLY INTEGRATED HELICOPTER PROGRAM. WITHIN SALES CASE PRIVATE MANUFACTURES WOULD PRESUMABLY PROVIDE HELICOPTERS, USG AND/OR PRIVATE MANUFACTURERS WOULD PROVIDE CONUS TRAINING, USG WOULD PROVIDE ARMAMENT, AND PRIVATE AMERICAN CONTRACTOR WOULD PROVIDE MAINTENANCE, OPERATIONAL TRAINING AND MAINTENANCE TRAINING IN BAHRAIN UNDER GENERAL SUPERVISION OF DOD LIAISON OFFICER RESPONSIBLE FOR OVERALL SALES CASE. SHAIKH HAMAD EXPRESSED HOPE THAT THE PRIVATE

FIRM WHICH HANDLED MAINTENANCE SUPPORT AND TRAINING FOR BDF HELICOPTER WING WOULD ALSO DEVELOP ON COMMERCIAL BASIS A REGIONAL HELICOPTER MAINTENANCE FACILITY IN BAHRAIN AND PERHAPS EVEN EXPAND ITS ACTIVITIES TO HELICOPTER ASSEMBLAGE AND POSSIBLY MANUFACTURE OF CERTAIN PARTS. SHAIKH HAMAD SAID HE HAD DISCUSSED THIS POSSIBILITY WITH FRENCH, WOULD WELCOME AMERICAN INTEREST, AND COULD ASSURE FULLEST GOB SUPPORT FOR A PRIVATE HELICOPTER MANUFACTURER SEEKING TO PARTICIPATE IN BAHRAIN'S ROLE AS A REGIONAL SERVICE AND DISTRIBUTION CENTER.

5. SHAIKH HAMAD SAID THAT IF USG WERE TO PARTICIPATE IN DEVELOPMENT OF BDF "AIR WING", IT WOULD BE ESSENTIAL FOR A USG SURVEY TEAM TO VISIT BAHRAIN NOT LATER THAN END OF APRIL SINCE FRENCH AND BRITISH WILL BE COMING THIS MONTH AND BDF FEELS URGENCY IN PUSHING AHEAD WITH ITS PLAN. HE SPECIFICALLY STATED THAT THREE U.S. MILITARY OFFICERS REPRESENTING EACH OF THE SERVICES WOULD BE SUFFICIENT TO BDF'S NEED AND THAT SEVERAL DAYS IN BAHRAIN SHOULD BE ALL THAT THE SURVEY WOULD REQUIRE. HE ASKED IF THERE WERE NOT U.S. MILITARY OFFICERS IN USMTM SAUDI ARABIA OR ENGAGED IN FMS ACTIVITIES IN KUWAIT QUALIFIED TO UNDERTAKE SURVEY WHO COULD BE MADE AVAILABLE.

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